

LETTERS FROM READERS

Is There a West German Menace?

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I think that Hal Lehrman has misread my book, *The Return of Germany: A Tale of Two Countries*, which he reviewed in COMMENTARY (April 1953). Since I greatly respect Lehrman as a conscientious and able colleague, and since the issues involved in his review transcend by far the interest in my book alone, I should like to set the record straight—at least on a few fundamental questions.

Lehrman says that I found "the Germans very often right and the West nearly always wrong." This is most misleading. I tried to report, and to make understandable, the temper and the facts of present-day Germany. I had to refer to many actions of early American occupation policy which—in German eyes—were "wrong," and left their impact. Often, in my own judgment, such measures were in fact "wrong," and indeed many have since been abandoned because there remained few doubts about their "wrongness." But Lehrman censures me for something quite different from this: my "general tendency," he writes, "is to absolve Germans in the mass as 'unpolitical,' blame the Americans for many of the German failings, and explain away certain German aberrations which are not so easily dismissible." I did none of these things.

It is true that I explained many seemingly puzzling German attitudes by a generalization about the prevalent "unpolitical" pattern of thought and behavior, with its passivity, lack of responsibility, and absence of those qualities of initiative, participation, and independence that mark citizenship in truly democratic countries. But I considered it my task to marshal the facts and leave it to my readers to draw up their own moral balance sheets. What I also did—explicitly in four chapters, *passim* throughout the book—was to explain the *very unsound* political and social consequences of this "unpolitical" attitude. Far from absolving the Germans because of their "unpolitical" attitude, I stressed the basic irresponsibility and political immaturity which underly it.

Nor did I "blame the Americans for many of the German failings." Repeatedly, I reported how and why many Germans blame Amer-

ica and presented *their* arguments, which, I thought, should be of some interest to American readers. But after this I went on to explain (p. 217ff., p. 294) that German blame of Americans was mostly alibis and rationalizations. . . .

The trauma inflicted by the Nazi Reich was so deep that many non-Germans, including many genuinely fair-minded individuals like Lehrman, feel almost a compulsion to see its horrifying specter loom on the horizon once again. "To be fair," Lehrman introduces his criticisms of my book, "it must be said that Muhlen's book is primarily not about the West German menace but 'a tale of two countries'—the two current Germanies." Why does Lehrman seem to feel that the fact that a book on Germany is not only a book on the "West German menace," but also deals with East Germany, needs explaining? Suppose a book on America by a modern Tocqueville were reviewed with the "fair," apologetic introduction that it is *not*, say, about "American materialism," nor about "the Wall Street paradise." Must a serious reporter continue to focus on fearsome, hostile stereotypes in the minds of his readers and critics, or is it not rather his duty to face and tackle the more complicated, more interesting realities as he found them? If I did not write a book about "the West German menace," it was for the simple reason that I found many more factors militating against such a potential menace than supporting it—while, at the same time, I found a clear and present menace in the Soviet power which controls East Germany.

I SHARE with Lehrman, and with my other American as well as German friends, the conviction that we must watch with particular vigilance for signs of a re-emerging totalitarian menace in West Germany. (To stress this should be superfluous for one who fought Nazism in action for ten years—at times and places where this was, to say the least, far from being popular. . . .) I can see in West Germany little more than a few sporadic evidences of residual Nazism, and little politically organized anti-Semitic neo-Nazism with present strength or popular attractive power—in short, nothing that could be termed a "menace."

I believe my conclusions are justified by the facts. My reviewer does not; and thinks fit to cast doubt on the correctness of my facts. Unfortunately I don't have the space to answer in full all the questions he raises. When I talked to German audiences about America, and was inevitably asked, in three words, "And the lynchings?" it always took me several minutes to explain (not to "explain away") the facts and their meaning. Similarly with the kind of questions Lehrman asks in his review.

"And the recent arrests of sub-Fuehrers?" Lehrman asks, casting doubt on my view that present neo-Nazism seems destined to failure. There have also been recent arrests of a larger number of Communist conspirators in West Germany—yet nobody considered this as a danger signal that West Germany was going Communist.

"And the sub-rosa Nazi proclivities of the FDP and the open pro-fascism of the DP?" (two West German right-of-center parties) asks Lehrman. The DP—which polled 4 per cent of the vote in 1949, and does not seem to have increased its following since—cannot be called pro-fascist if we judge it by its political program and record rather than occasional oratorical phrases in an election speech. Messrs. Seeböhm, Hellwege, and Mühlenfeld, the leaders of that party, are ultra-conservative reactionaries whose anti-Marxist and monarchist views hark back to the era of Bismarck; they expelled all the genuine pro-Nazis (in North Rhine-Westphalia where the DP stands for the reestablishment of the Guelphish, pre-Hohenzollern rulers, and in Schleswig-Holstein), and voted for the Israel Reparations Treaty, the Western defense pacts, the other post-Nazi pro-Western commitments. It is even more mistaken or unfair to charge the FDP with "pro-Nazi proclivities." That party is a strange amalgam of old-fashioned, strongly anti-Nazi liberals (such as Federal President Theodor Heuss, and Minister-President Reinhold Maier), and of conservative, sometimes reactionary rightists. They try to win former Nazi party members for their party, as do all the other German parties, though the latter admit to it less openly, considering that it is better to commit them to the democratic cause rather than turn them into a dangerous enclave of permanent outcasts. To call the FDP "pro-Nazi" is to commit the old error of confusing rightists with revolutionary totalitarians, a very different breed altogether.

And the infiltration of secret Nazi faithfuls into these parties, Lehrman asks? Undoubtedly a few have tried to infiltrate. Yet the same people who fairly object to calling "Communist" those American parties, churches, civil liberties

groups, and unions in which a few secret Communists have infiltrated without conquering them, seem to have no scruples about calling those German parties "Nazi" in which the same thing has happened.

What about the Nazis in the Bonn Foreign Office? When the government was charged with sheltering a large number of them, Chancellor Adenauer ordered an investigation. Those who had actively been connected with Nazi crimes, and had succeeded in hiding their dark record during the turbulent postwar years, were immediately dismissed. Those of whose sincere conversion to the new ideas the Chancellor had personally convinced himself (as he assured me at the time) were kept in office.

LEHRMAN'S criticism of my report on anti-Semitism in Germany today is mainly concerned with the Auerbach case—which I described with intentional terseness. That the man who had him arrested "had a good anti-Nazi record"—Lehrman's words for my report that he was sentenced to death by a Nazi People's Court for his anti-Nazi activities—seems rather relevant in the light of the question whether Auerbach was a victim of neo-Nazi anti-Semitic persecution. On the other hand, the correct handling of the case by the judges was acknowledged by the defendants' lawyers themselves. It is true that, as Lehrman says, "one of the chief prosecution witnesses has since been jailed for perjury," but the case in which he perjured himself had nothing at all to do with the Auerbach case, and was tried only *after* Auerbach was dead. The state prosecutor declared that if he had known beforehand about it, he would not have used the witness, whose general credibility would have been impaired; but it does not seem likely that a different verdict would have been reached. Schumacher, who died exactly four days later, did not "express his horror over the case" to Auerbach's widow, as Lehrman states; what he did was to send a message of condolence to the widow of the man who had been a member of his party. In the public statement in which he, like other German politicians, expresses his regret concerning the suicide, he wrote that Auerbach "might well have transgressed the limits of the law" (*die Grenze des Erlaubten gestreift*). Although the full history of the Auerbach case will probably never be written, Lehrman's questions cannot change the conclusion reached in my book that Auerbach was not a victim of anti-Semitic persecution.

It seems a distressing paradox that many people outside of Germany consider it lack of sympathy with the Jewish victims of the Nazi crime if one reports and documents (as I did)

that pogromism and extermination was the terror rule of a totalitarian minority, and that the Nazi doctrine of racial hatred failed to leave a lasting impact on the German mind. In fact, any reporter who fails to report, because he fails to find, the signs of German anti-Semitism which people abroad expect him to see, runs the risk of having himself suspected of lack of sympathy for the Jews—or even of anti-Semitism.

Lehrman writes of "the German desire 'to see as few Jews as possible in our universities.'" I do not doubt that some German voiced such a desire, and that there are quite a few thousand crackpots, fanatics, hate-consumed people in Germany today who agree with him. However, this hardly makes it "the German desire," since Jewish students and professors are sincerely encouraged to come to West German universities, and since, according to all the evidence available, there is today less anti-Semitism in West German universities than there has been for decades. . . .

Does not Lehrman's review boil down to his dislike of the fact that my book deals factually with *present-day* Germany, rather than concentrating once more on condemning *yesterday's* Germany, and speculating on the potential menace of *tomorrow's* Germany?

We cannot hope for a stable, free democratic Germany if we see her primarily in fearsome stereotypes based on the crimes of the Nazi regime; by treating the German nation as a permanently unregenerate criminal, we abort the real possibilities of regeneration. Are not "stringent measures" of tutelage and control based on uninformed suspicion less prudent, less persuasive, and less safe than an attitude of realistic understanding and (if I may use that much maligned term) brotherhood?

NORBERT MUHLEN

New York City

Mr. Lehrman Replies

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

One recent convivial afternoon Miss Freda Utlej, who finds Mr. Muhlen's book flawless and, as is well known, writes, speaks, and testifies with passionate restraint, said about this reviewer: "Oh, him! He *always* kills a book unless it screams bloody murder against the Germans!" A characteristically moderate judgment. Apart from Mr. Muhlen's study, I have reviewed a grand total of four books on Germany, all favorably except one, which I "killed" precisely *because* it screamed "bloody murder against the Germans."

I drag Miss Utlej and myself in here not because it was Mr. Muhlen she happened to

be comforting at the moment, but because she and he, as his letter reveals, share a typical serene benevolence toward those who try to look at Germany whole. It appears that I, along with many other "non-Germans," suffer from a "trauma" induced by the Nazis, that we "feel almost a compulsion" to look under beds for them, and that we are blinded by "fearsome, hostile stereotypes." In the same breath, Mr. Muhlen compliments me on being a "genuinely fair-minded individual," a colleague "conscientious and able." Now, really, how can both these estimates be true? Is it perhaps that Mr. Muhlen thinks me "fair-minded" when I write about Hungary, Bulgaria, Egypt, or Israel, where he agrees with me, but thinks me ridden with bogies when I write about Germany, where he does not agree with me?

I must go on being personal about this because essentially the argument between us is one of personal attitude. So let me say that before opening Mr. Muhlen's book I expected to be able to praise it. I thought so because I had read his articles on Germany in this magazine. They showed a novel, refreshing balance on a subject clouded by hatred. They duly noted the seamy aspects of present-day Germany but also affirmed the existence of democratic elements—in defiance of the all-out Germanophobes, whose extremism I deplore as much as Mr. Muhlen does. I was confident that any book by him on Germany would also be helpful for those readers whom Mr. Muhlen and I should want to persuade—those who neither condemn nor acquit, feeling the desperate need for a German democracy and yet knowing the obstacles before it.

Unhappily, in his book Mr. Muhlen has lost the admirable balance of his COMMENTARY articles, and in fact leans over so far that he is nearly flat on his back, to prove there is little really to worry about in West Germany except the possibility of future American bungling. The gaps in his analysis of the *German* threats to German democracy—and to European security—are so vast and obvious that many who might have been instructed will be repelled. His book can influence few except those already persuaded. That is why, as a "colleague" emphatically believing with him that Germany may yet rise fair and free, I felt obliged to report that he had missed his great occasion by failing to tell the *full* story.

Mr. Muhlen's letter is almost as long as my review (which discussed two other books as well). It would be too much to attempt a labored rebuttal of each labored point, with counter-quotes for his quotes. I am sure Mr. Muhlen will not object if I urge readers instead to decide between us by consulting his

book directly. I would only single out some matters here which illustrate what I think are his sins of evasion or omission.

Mr. Muhlen seems to measure the "Nazi" threat by proportion of electoral votes. Since when does numerical strength indicate the real potential of a totalitarian party? Were the Communists a majority in Russia or in any other country where they now dominate? Or, for that matter, were the Hitlerites before 1933?

Mr. Muhlen pooh-poohs neo-Nazi activities. His book at least should have mentioned these activities. Didn't he know about Werner Naumann, for instance, whose conspiracy is today being taken quite seriously (not only by the *New York Times*, which Mr. Muhlen has lately cudged as also suffering from trauma, but by Chancellor Adenauer, too, and even the FDP)? And if there are neo-Nazis in various major parties (whom the parties are throwing out to attract the liberal-labor vote in advance of the elections), why didn't Mr. Muhlen's book say so?

Is "sporadic . . . residual Nazism" the only "totalitarian menace"? Are there no other authoritarian reactionaries on the loose in Mr. Muhlen's Germany? Have the ultra-nationalists, the Junkers, the diehard General Staff types all faded away? I do not yield to Mr. Muhlen in concern over the "overwhelmingly large menace" of the Soviets in East Germany and other places. By all means expose, as Mr. Muhlen skillfully does, the threat to our security in East Germany. But how about the possibility of also getting kicked in the teeth by West Germany, which has three times the population and a rapidly expanding North Rhine-Westphalia heavy industry—the arsenal of earlier German adventures?

Are the increasing intimacies of Rhineland industrialists with East German and Russian Communists not even worth a reference? Are the shipments in strategic and critical materials, or the links between the military on both sides of the demarcation line, to be totally ignored? And do the "realities of today" truly have nothing to do with "yesterday's Germany"—the Germany of Rapallo, of the Soviet-Nazi pact, of Red Army-Reichswehr-Wehrmacht collaboration—or with "tomorrow's Germany"? The troublesome "potentials" agitate British and American military intelligence files considerably more than they seem to disturb the calm in Mr. Muhlen's library. The past does not necessarily tyrannize the future. But to deny that there is any connection—in this case a connection made firm by numerous current events—is to spin a rather quaint philosophy of history.

HAL LEHRMAN

New York City

The Archdeacon Objects

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I am grateful to you for sending me the January 1953 edition of your COMMENTARY if only for the fact that it gives me the opportunity of wholly disclaiming the statement attributed to me in C. Berkeley Cooke's somewhat muddled article on "Doing Business the Iraqi Way." I wish to state publicly that I did not make the monstrous statement attributed to me or any other similar statement.

My work brings me into touch but seldom with Iraqi businessmen, but the few that I do know in this progressive country have my admiration and deepest respect and I am both happy and honoured to number them among my friends.

Will you please publish this in your next available issue.

C. V. ROBERTS
Archdeacon in Iraq and
Eastern Arabia

Bagdad, Iraq

Mr. Cooke Answers

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Below please find a copy of the reply that I sent directly to Archdeacon Cyril V. Roberts of St. George's Episcopal Church in Bagdad, Iraq.

"My Dear Archdeacon Roberts:

"It is proverbial that our British brothers can never understand American humor. But I am sorry that you were apparently so disturbed by the quotation attributed to you in my Bagdad article in the January COMMENTARY.

"Obviously, the word of an archdeacon will be universally accepted against that of a mere Wall Street businessman. Therefore all I can do is to 'turn the other cheek.'

"However, I would like to add, my dear friend, that it can be construed as a very great compliment to me if your denial carries the inference that I might have such a fantastic imagination as to have been able to create that rare and priceless little story about the Moslem character purely from fiction!"

C. BERKELEY COOKE, JR.
Watch Hill, Rhode Island

Correction

WE regret that the name of Mr. Franz Kobler, editor of *A Treasury of Jewish Letters*, was incorrectly given as "Kohler" in the preface to Maimonides' "Letter to His Translator" (April 1953).—Ed.